FRAMEWORK 7

Consensus vs. Consent

> **PURPOSE:** *Choose the right model for a group decision, everyone agrees (consensus) or no one has a paramount objection (consent), and run it explicitly.*

Decision / proposal: *One sentence*	**Facilitator:** *Enter name*	**Date:** *MM/DD/YYYY*

HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK

Consensus means everyone agrees with the decision. Consent means no one has a paramount objection, a reason the decision would cause harm. Understanding the difference helps you choose the right approach and avoid both endless debate and silent resentment.

Default to consent for most decisions (faster, good enough). Use consensus for foundational decisions such as values and major changes. Whichever you pick, be explicit about which model you are using.

THE TWO MODELS

	Consensus	Consent
Standard	Everyone agrees with the decision.	No one has a paramount objection (a reason the decision would cause harm).
When to use	Team norms or values. Decisions that require universal buy-in. Small teams with high trust. Decisions with no clear authority.	Need faster decisions than consensus allows. Different levels of preference but no deal-breakers. Experimenting with new approaches. Most team decisions.
Pros	High commitment from everyone. Diverse input integrated. Strong team cohesion.	Faster than consensus. Allows “good enough” decisions. Respects strong concerns while avoiding endless debate. Enables experimentation.
Cons	Can be very slow. May produce compromise solutions that satisfy no one. Can be hijacked by the most stubborn person. Not practical for many decisions.	Can feel like settling. Requires shared understanding of “paramount.”

CHOOSE THE MODEL FOR THIS DECISION

Is this foundational?	*Values, norms, a major change: lean consensus*
Does execution require universal buy-in?	*Yes / No*
Are there deal-breakers, or only preferences?	*Preferences only: lean consent*
Model we are using	*CONSENSUS or CONSENT, stated to the group*

RUNNING A CONSENT DECISION

1. Present the proposal.
2. Ask: “Does anyone have a paramount objection, a reason this would cause significant harm?”
3. If yes, address the objection or modify the proposal. If no, move forward.

What to say: “We’re using consent decision-making. That means we move forward unless someone has a paramount objection, a reason this would cause significant harm. This isn’t about getting everyone’s favorite option, but ensuring we don’t do something harmful. Does anyone have a paramount objection?”

OBJECTIONS RAISED

Raised by	Objection	Paramount? (harm, not preference)	How it was addressed

EXAMPLES: WHAT COUNTS AS A PARAMOUNT OBJECTION

Valid: “This would violate our security standards and create serious risk.” Valid: “This would require skills our team doesn’t have and can’t learn quickly.”

Invalid: “I prefer a different approach.” (Preference, not objection.) Invalid: “I’m not sure this will work.” (Uncertainty, not harm.)

Pro Tip: Default to consent for most decisions, save consensus for foundational ones, and always tell the group which model you are using before you ask the question.